The Death Valley '49ers

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As I Remember Them

By Bill Bender

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*Deceased

❖Expired during term of office

ON THE COVER: Bill Bender sketched the young artist for this keepsake.

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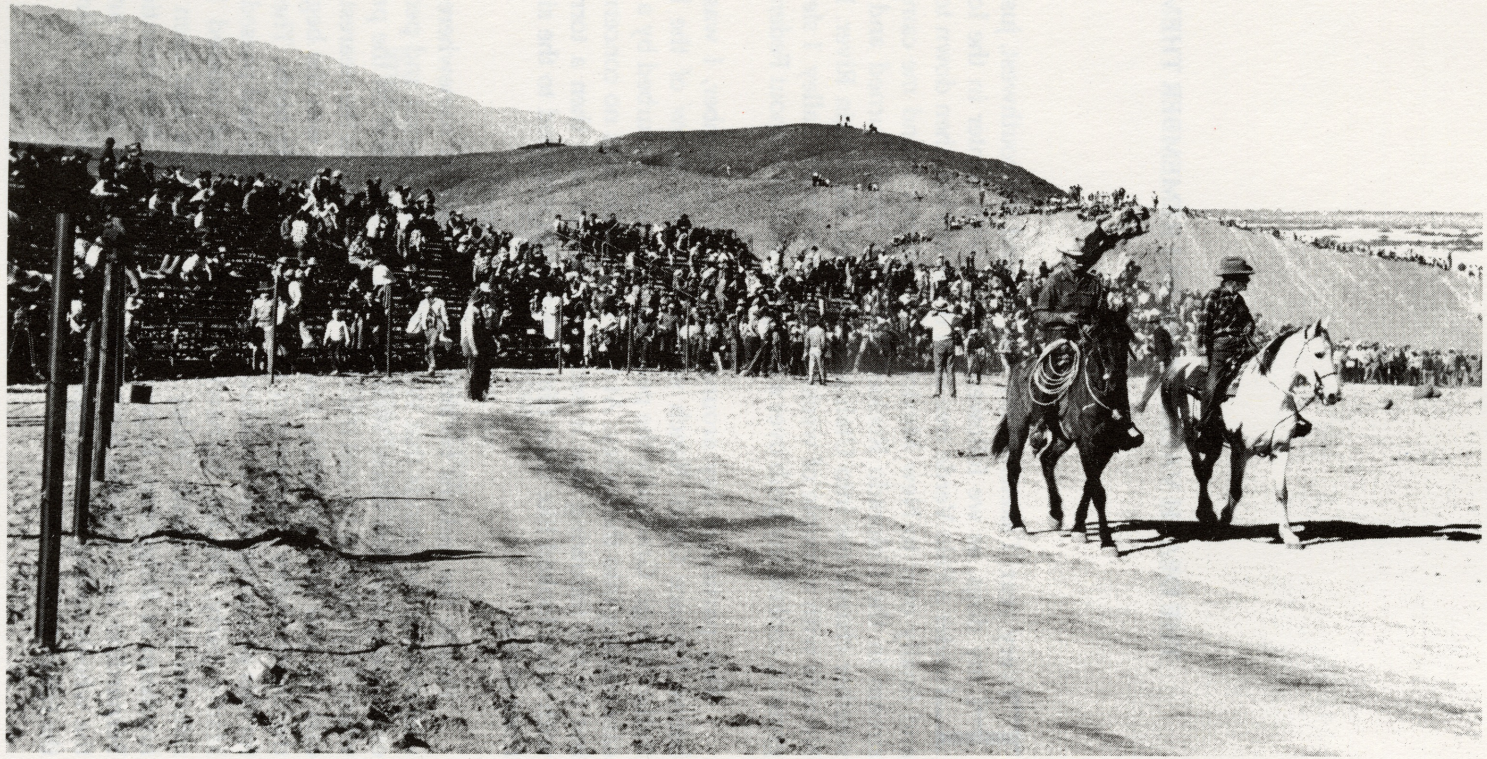
THE DEATH VALLEY '49ers AS I REMEMBER THEM

Every year I sketched my way around the southwest, just me and my dogs, as we followed the sun with winter in the low desert under a Palo Verde tree until it got too hot, then down to Arizona and finally over to New Mexico. Mid summer found me camped by a stream in the Colorado Rockies until the leaves turned and the cool weather chased me into Utah as I followed the Virgin River. Next was Nevada with a couple of weeks detour into Death Valley. I slept on the ground, cooked my grub over a campfire, and all without Federal aid.

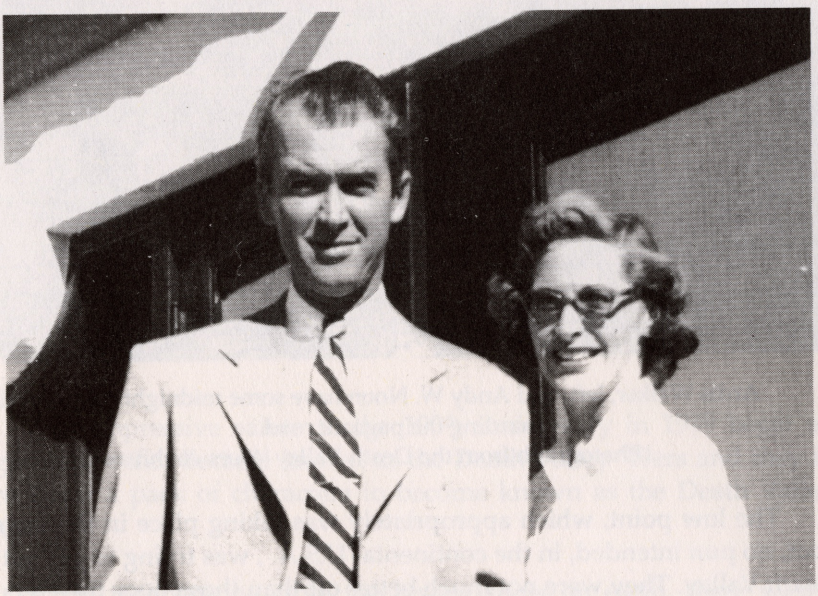
This particular day around the last of November, I was camped below Furnace Creek Ranch within a stone's throw of the Panamint Indian village. Gradually the peaceful quiet was disturbed by a trickle of cars coming into the valley. At first that trickle was no concern of mine but by the following day it became a stream and then a torrent. Cars with what looked like their life's belongings strapped to the sides, rear, front or top.

Finally the Indians became a little uneasy as somewhere a rumor was making the rounds that World War III had started and people were evacuating the west coast. Well that got my attention on the pronto and when they asked if I'd nail it down, I made tracks to the nearest group of cars. As you have probably guessed by now, that was the beginning of the Death Valley Pageant and these were the early birds. The occasion for this gathering was to celebrate the 100 years that had passed since the Manly party, Wades, Jayhawkers and others had crossed here and referred to it as Death Valley. A year before there had been a special luncheon at Ridgecrest. Representatives from the four counties of San Bernardino. Los Angeles, Kern and Inyo had gotten together and started the wheels rolling for this gigantic blowout we were now witnessing in the fall of 1949.



Mounted patrol arrives at Desolation Canyon pageant site around noon, December 3, 1949.
Photograph from Death Valley '49ers Archives

For a spell it didn't seem like it would fly. Who wants to drive plumb out to Death Valley for an old pageant? Then Jimmy Stewart agreed to be chief narrator which gave it a little identity. With tongue in cheek the promoters hoped now that maybe 3,000 brave souls would venture forth. With hammers in hand they went for broke and built a grandstand in Desolation Canyon to hold 5,000. As time drew nearer and with little response from the public, they figured perhaps a few benches and a couple of chairs would have sufficed. About then my good friend Ed Ainsworth, columnist for the Los Angeles Times, picked up the baton and sprinted full speed ahead to the finish line. Ed was widely read throughout the southwest and with his ability to paint glowing masterpieces with a language containing only 26 letters has always remained a mystery to me. But he could and soon he had thousands chafing at the bit to get to Death Valley no matter what the cost or sacrifice. So this onslaught "we indians" were watching represented the literate of California or at least subscribers to the L. A. Times. When the last wheel had turned and last tent had been pitched, the estimate was over one hundred thousand folks had shoehorned their way into the valley. Naturally the show was a gigantic success.



James and Gloria Stewart in Death Valley, December 3, 1949.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives

As I search through my memory bank, time still hasn't erased some of the high and low points of that gathering. The most beautiful sight ever to be experienced in Death Valley, and likely to never be seen again, were the twinkling little campfires glowing as far as the eye could see.

From a vantage point you could look upward and view the stars in the heavens. Look downward and it was mirrored on the ground, man-made. At that time there were no camping restrictions so folks were everywhere and enjoying every moment. Their singing and music floated plumb up to Cow Creek where the Clampers were encamped and doing their thing.

Ardis Walker, left, and Andy W. Noon have some midnight coffee while guarding the pageant road.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives

The low point, which appropriately was taking place in the lowest spot, no pun intended, in the continental U.S.A. , was trying to get out of Death Valley. They were not much better off than those poor travelers in 1849, only this time the lack of gasoline was the culprit. Not geared for heavy traffic the few gas pumps and the storage tanks beneath the sand could not keep up with the demand and many never got out of the valley for several days. The gasoline trucks rolled day and night trying to help everyone get back to civilization again.

Ferde Grofé composed his Death Valley Suite which was performed by the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra at the Death Valley Centennial Celebration on December 3, 1949 in Desolation Canyon.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

That impressive salute to the 100th anniversary in 1949 begat an organization that became known as the Death Valley '49ers and they in turn begat a pack of characters to become known as the Death Valley Artists.

While recuperating from the lowest show on earth, there wasn't much thought given to ever try it again. However, as days became weeks and finally months, time, the great healer, erased memories of all the stress, confusion and turmoil. A few farsighted men looked down the road and envisioned a way to bring all lovers of the desert together once a year. Not on the magnitude of the first one but just a mingling of kindred souls and see what would become of it.

John Hilton was in no way aware of this meeting nor anywhere close but when it caught up with him through the grapevine, what intrigued him was the idea was "born" on the same day he was... September 9th. That was enough of an omen to get the wheels spinning beneath his sombrero. He had no idea of where I was in my travels but found out from Harriet Day who was curator of the Desert Magazine Art Gallery. Both John and I showed there and I always let "Mother Day", as she was fondly called by the children of the desert, where I was or expected to be just in case she sold a painting and had a check for me. Now if you ever tried deciphering John's handwriting, it was an experience you'd vividly recall for several lifetimes. That's exactly what I was doing a few days later high in the Rockies when his letter came to roost in the general delivery slot. It all boiled down to one common denominator: Money! We should both show up at this encampment with our desert paintings and we might make a few sales to these desert lovers.

As I recall, the 1950 encampment was mostly entertainment around the campfire plus some square dancing and a contest among the photographers for the best Death Valley picture. John and I set up our paintings during the day and with tongue in cheek hoped for a few miracles. The outcome of that first display was not so overwhelming in the money department but we did fair to middlin' and made a heap of new friends. John was a raconteur of the first water and if something didn't exist, it did when he finished. In the pre-television days, people were more trusting and naïve and they loved the unending tales he spun. When that needed a change of pace, out came the guitar and a new side presented itself. I don't recall how much we sold but we had enough dimes rubbing together to wine and dine ourselves at the Inn and still buy gasoline to get us out of the valley. We always saw to it that we had gasoline, even if it meant pooling our money.

Mingling with the elite at the Inn paid off in other ways, namely an invite to show on the patio of the Inn in 1951, if there was to be another encampment. Not only was there another encampment but John was appointed head honcho and I was second in command...but in command of what? Among other things John was in love and bouncing around like a toad in a tub between the desert and Los Angeles, dutifully courting Barbara. If there were going to be more artists showing at the next show, it was apparently up to me to do the legwork. Come summer though, John and Barbara said "I Do" and promised to walk through life in double harness from there on out. "Good", says I. "Now he can help me go out and twist some arms so we can put on a good show at the

third encampment". However, the honeymoon was over and Barbara kept that new husband of hers chained to the easel. There were such things as utilities, taxes and a mortgage plus the other necessities of life.

The first art shows were held on the patio of Furnace Creek Inn, starting in 1951 and continuing until the National Park Service Visitor Center became available for the 1959 encampment.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

On the big days, December 1st and 2nd of 1951, I had rounded up four new artists willing to make the long trip to Death Valley. Marjorie Ransom Cummins, Sylvia Winslow, Kirk Martin and Fritiof Persson. John wrote Aim Morhardt and got him to come. Like promised we were allowed to set up on the front steps of the Inn. A room was provided at night to store the paintings. Marjorie and Sylvia had working husbands and Aim had a working wife plus he was also a teacher in Bishop. Anything they sold was frosting on the cake and they could afford the luxury of renting a room. With the rest of us it was catch as catch can. Kirk and wife Laurel slept in a tiny trailer while John and Barbara talked someone into letting them sleep in the old CCC barracks. Fritiof snoozed in his old van while I as usual curled up around a sagebrush. The evenings were especially memorable as there still were no rules on camping and campfires twinkled for miles all over the desert floor, much the same as the 1949 encampment but not as crowded. The new artists were a great addition to the encampment even though we didn't sell too

many paintings. People just seemed happy to rub elbows with the artists and you couldn't walk near a campfire without a hearty welcome and an invite to come sit, eat and drink a spell.

1952 ushered in the fourth Death Valley Encampment and now things were really beginning to cook. We were a permanent fixture in Death Valley for sure. It was now a four day event which would coincide with the Armistice Day weekend. The artists even had their own breakfast on Monday morning on the golf course and besides entertainment in the way of song by John and Aim, we began doing a composite painting on the site. This was really a crowd pleaser and probably a first for most of the audience to see how we dab the paint on. We had added a few more artists and already you could see the friction mounting which the original group never had. For instance we had an allotted time for each person to paint on the composite. Those new ones were either stone deaf or were hell bent on using free paint as they had to be practically hog tied to make 'em quit. Also if one person put in a cloud and the next in line happened to touch it or redo the mess up went a howl from the first cloud painter. Not only was it interesting to watch the painting progress but also exciting how some artists reacted ..a painting derby and Keystone Kop comedy all rolled into one. The Photographer's and Author's Breakfasts were pussycats compared to us. Ardis Walker would auction off the completed but dripping wet composite painting on the spot. Each participating artist had signed it on the back so even if the spontaneous painting wasn't much to write home about, at least it was a conversation piece. Consequently Ardis was never able to sell them for much over $100.

Also 1952 saw the beginning of rules and regulations governing the thousands of people and the first to go was where you could camp. No longer did the many campfires dot the valley floor. This year we were herded into designated areas where you stood in line to brush your teeth, wash your face and go potty. It also saw plans for the new museum and visitor center which would hopefully become a reality in six to eight years. And I believe 1952 was the year John Hilton wrote the official song for the Death Valley '49ers. How it came about is interesting. Now that John was married and even began gardening, this one particular day he was working in his strawberry patch , applying manure. The words to the song began bouncing around in his head and he'd run into the house and write them down. By the time he had finished with the strawberry patch he also had the song roughly completed. He never did know if the inspiration came from the strawberries or the manure.

An estimated 12,000 people attended the 5th encampment held November 13-15, 1953. The Artists Breakfast was rescheduled to Saturday which to us was "prime time". Another composite painting was attempted by the artists but this year, rather than auction it off wet, I took it home. The idea was to cover all the blank canvas and also come as close as possible to each artist's style and pull it together, thus making a completed painting, no blank spots and completely dry. Again all the artists signed it on the back.

A sad note to the encampment was Johnny Shoshone, a Panamint Indian who suffered a stroke several weeks before the encampment. His estimated age was 90 and he enjoyed showing up as it caused a lot of attention amongst the campers. There were several light haired and a redhead in the 40 or so of the tribe living below Furnace Creek Ranch. When a camper asked Johnny once if they were half breeds, he snorted back and said, "Damn no. Them half CCC". On the lighter side Death Valley now had a modern $250,000 airport, the only one in the USA operating below sea level. The dedication ceremony saw the start of daily mail and passenger service by Bonanza Airlines and I made sure to get a letter sent out on that first flight.

The 5th encampment observed the loss of Johnny Shoshone a few weeks before, the dedication of the airport during and the passing of Death Valley Scotty a month later. Scotty was buried on a hill overlooking Scotty's Castle. John Hilton with his ever present guitar sang a prospector's song at the gravesite. Those present presumed it had been especially written for Scotty but in reality John had written it twenty years before during the depression for an old miner by the name of Bill Clark who had taught John how to pan for gold and of the many secrets of mining.

The 6th encampment, November 11-14, 1954, found us still showing at the Inn. Armistice Day had now been changed to Veterans Day and I reckon that's the way it'll be known from here on out. At the Artists' Breakfast we began another composite as we didn't seem to have as many speakers as the photographers and authors did at their breakfasts. There's not much an artist can talk about except pushing the paint around and dodging the bill collectors. The ones that would speak had such egos they imagined themselves as centers of the universe so we kept the audience entertained with the composite painting. Since I was taking the wet ones home now, pulling them together and auctioning them framed, Ardis was getting better price that stood up on its own hind feet and demanded attention.

The 1966 Death Valley '49ers Board of Directors and Advisor Directors

(Photograph taken November 14, 1995)

1st Row: Paul Palmer, Alex Krater, Hugh Tolford, Pres. Hazel Henderson, G. Henry Stetson, John Aubuchon, Paul Bailey, Edie Rankin, Charlie Scholl, Floyd Evans.

2nd Row: Jay Bibby, Ralph Fear, Les Moore.

3rd Row: Paul DeDecker, Ted Fraser, Harold Ihrig.

4th Row: Willard Lewis, Tom Mathew, John Long, Charles Blenman.

5th Row: Bill Newbro, Aim Morhardt, Doc Broadbent.

On Top: George Sturtevant, Tom Baskin, Ardis Walker, Burr Belden, Ward.

All wearing their new "Boss of the Plains" 3X beaver Stetson hats made available to them through G. Henry Stetson. This is the original block used for the early day hats of this same name.

Ardis Walker and I had more or less taken the breakfast over and John and Aim did all the musical entertainment. With me as the M. C. and Ardis as auctioneer we began a little chatter that grew like Topsy and was completely unrehearsed. I began referring to him as "Paw" and he called me his illegitimate son. Kernville was now renamed Whiskey Flats and for the other eleven months Paw was a bootlegger with a still way back in the hills. I would pose as his obedient son trying to save enough money to put myself through school before I became to dad blamed old. Of course Paw kept me so busy running booze I didn't have time for an education so we're a pair of ignoramuses and around that theme we play out scenario after scenario. We kept an unrehearsed conversation going year after year, never knowing what the other was going to say, such as the time I suggested he blow up "them revenooers" car and he burned his lips so badly 'cause he didn't know the tailpipe was still hot. Maw an' me had to pour food in his ears 'cause his lips were so swollen they plumb shut out all the light to his eyes. He walked around all day with a flashlight burning but he still couldn't see where he was going. It took all the money I'd saved up for school just to keep him in flashlight batteries. Yes, we finally wove Gale into these yarns and then Ardis had to tiptoe around explaining how, when and where I became illegitimate. The strange part about all this jabber coming out of our mouths was about half the crowd was convinced I was his son but too polite to ask if I really was illegitimate. Many thought we really had a still somewhere and a few even asked if they could make a purchase.

The 7th encampment in 1955 found us still showing at the Inn but now I had a brand spankin' new one ton Ford truck with an aluminum camper mounted to the frame. Wow! After snoozing on the ground so long this was a mansion. It had a large refrigerator, two large water tanks and both direct current and gas lights. The best part was I had plenty of room for extra paintings so I began lugging out other artists' paintings who wouldn't or couldn't make the trip: Clyde Forsythe, Paul Laritz, Agnes Pelton and Bill Hampton to name a few. This gave our show a much better word of mouth approval rating and we were getting the reputation of having one of the best exhibits of western paintings. Incidentally I wasn't the only one with a new set of wheels. Just about time for the Death Valley show, John Hilton chanced to sell a few paintings out of the Desert Magazine Art Gallery. They went to one person and John's share was around $1,500. He was hurting for cash when he got wind of the sale and off to Palm Desert he went in a swirl of dust. Randall Henderson had a strict policy about sales and the artist didn't get one red cent until the buyer's check cleared the bank and he wasn't about to make any exceptions. However, John gave him such a sob story...his electricity was about to be turned off, he needed propane,

his mortgage was due...blah, blah, blah. Finally, against his better judgement, Randall relented and wrote a $1,500 check from his own account. Then after the show was over and Randall and his wife Cyria were returning home, just out of Banning they heard this peep, peep, peep. Sailing by them was John and Barbara, happy as a couple of clams at high tide, waving from their brand new International van, to heck with the electricity, propane or mortgage...and that was the last time Randall ever bought one of John's sob stories.

John Hilton and his guitar entertain a distinguished group.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

The 8th, 9th and 10th encampments went along as usual with nothing exciting happening I can think about except I was making enough jingle-jingle that I too could afford to get married which we did in 1957. Now Helen became as involved as I which made the show much easier to hang. Things were changing fast by the time of the 11th encampment in 1959. The Museum and Visitor Center was now a reality and though not completely finished, the new patio made an excellent place to exhibit our paintings. Walled in and protected from the wind, there wasn't the constant fear of paintings sent sprawling by a sudden gust. With all the room and protection I could reach out to the big names in desert painters and try twisting arms again. It hadn't worked the first time back in '51 but with our growing reputation and a great place to show, plus Helen and I would both pick up and deliver their paintings safely back, it might work. The only sad part was Fritiof Persson, who had been with us from the start, was going blind and had to retire his brushes. He never

Trailers towed by cars are replacing tent campers at Texas Springs in the 1950s.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

did too well in the selling department and there were days he would sit in his old van and eat corn flakes soaked in canned milk and sugar three times a day. When John and I would sell something and pool our money to do a little celebrating, he was always invited along but he had such a fierce pride he would never accept what he considered charity.

The art show moved from Furnace Creek Inn to the new National Park Service Visitor Center patio for the first time during the 1959 encampment. The Museum and Visitor Center were dedicated the next year.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

The 12th encampment in 1960 had to be our most exciting year. Now being married, complete with house and telephone, I kept the wires humming. All the big names were agreeable to send a painting to be hung if we'd pick them up and also return. In October Helen and I cranked up the camper and began making the rounds. After being on the road for two days we had Orpha Klinker, Jimmy Swinnerton, Bert Proctor, Bill Darling, Bill Khrem, Fred Penney, Frank Adams, Karl Albert, Claude Parson and Brownell McGrew. Eventually some dropped out but new ones were added and religiously for the next ten years Helen and I spent two days before the show picking up the paintings and two days afterwards returning them. This pick up and delivery

Aim Morhardt entertains at the Stove Pipe Wells Burro Flapjack Race.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

routine called for several things, namely patience and a healthy bladder. At every stop we had to answer the many questions bounced our way and over a cup or two of coffee. Each person made coffee differently and it took some getting used to. 1960 was also the first year we hung the invitation show inside the auditorium. The railing wasn't up yet so we had to show them on easels and with all the little kids running around we were constantly grabbing for paintings before they hit the floor. I stayed so busy just doing that so Helen had to sit with my other paintings in the patio.

Also 1960 saw Ed Ainsworth's new book, *Painters of the Desert,* hit the book stores and it was an instant success. The first run sold for $9.35 which was so reasonable we gave them away for Christmas presents for our better customers. Today a copy sells between $350 and $400, depending on how many signatures it has. At that time all the painters in the book were hale and hearty, but today I'm the only one still alive. It's getting mighty lonesome out here! Even though we set up our paintings in the patio in 1959, this was the first year the Museum and Visitor Center was officially open and the dedication ceremonies were held at 10:00 AM on Saturday, November 12th.

Before the 1961 encampment, as usual, Helen and I picked up the paintings of the well known desert painters and brought them to Death Valley. This year the Park Service had put up a railing along the west wall of the auditorium where one painting from each of us was hung six feet above the floor and our trouble of the little kids knocking over the easels was eliminated. These paintings were the nucleus of the show and were voted on with three cash prizes given along with a trophy at the Artists' Breakfast. Where we had begged for paintings and painters a few years ago, now we had just the reverse going. Every person that dabbed wanted to be in the show and pretty soon the patio was in "easel gridlock". Something had to be done and that's when an inside show and outside show came into being. Showing in the patio was considered "inside" and on the lawn by the entrance to the Visitor Center was "outside". Naturally that set up a howl and gnashing of teeth as to who was qualified as professional. Everyone wanted to be inside although those on the outside were the first to have their paintings viewed by the public and if their paintings were of quality, they would have first pick of the buyer's wallet. We finally came up with the figure ten thousand. If a person made $10,000 per year selling paintings, he would be considered a professional. Well that took care of all our troubles, at least temporarily, but there were some diehards who wouldn't give up. The sad part was they were the worst painters and instead of striving to turn out acceptable work, their attitude was ...We'll never get that good so

Campfire sing-alongs were encampment features for many years.
Photograph from the Death Valley '49ers Archives.

why not destroy the whole thing and not have an art show. Of course that wasn't the attitude of the majority so they dug in their heels and went to work and before long some were inside. Today many are big name artists, no longer painting desert but spread out to the cowboy, indian, wildlife and other subjects.

The 14th encampment in 1962 was a wee bit smoother as everyone knew by now whether they belonged inside or outside. At breakfast we're still doing the composite painting, only now a different artist takes the wet painting home at the end of the show to complete it before the next encampment. The only difference was where before I tried to keep each artist's individual style intact, this person repainted the whole thing his way. The only part making it unique were all the signatures on the back. Believe it or not, the buyers went for this refined work reflecting just one artist's style and Ardis Walker got the highest price ever for the painting. From then on we sent the wet painting home with a different artist every year and Ardis kept getting higher and higher prices. We still had our Paw and illegitimate son episodes and as long as the public liked it, we kept coming up with bigger and better stuff.

There were 18,000 visitors at the 1962 encampment and there were people everywhere so little by little it was necessary to add a few more rules. It was no different with us and then this one ton flatbed truck pulled up with the largest painting ever entered in the show. It measured six feet by ten feet and was framed with 2x6 boards. It took four of us to muscle it off the truck and since it was too heavy to hang, we leaned it against a wall on the ground. The painter insisted there was nary a rule as to size but you can bet your bottom dollar I had the sizes spelled out for the 1963 show.

Everyone is aware of how slow our government works but it does get around to it eventually. The disgruntled Sunday painters from several years ago had quietly gone to work to shoot the whole art show down. They wrote their congressmen saying how they were discriminated against in a government park. Another letter was sent out describing us as vendors of the carnival variety unlawfully operating in the Death Valley National Monument. Last but not least were turned in to the California Board of Equalization for not collecting sales tax and a letter was also fired off to the Internal Revenue Service. These gents, I must admit, did a very thorough job and left no stones unturned. The artists usually dealt with the Board of Equalization individually. I know my gross was estimated at the beginning of the year and paid quarterly but the '49ers officers in power at the time, to play it safe, set up a booth

to collect the state sales tax. All our other problems were diplomatically resolved by them and the art show continued to grow and to prosper. And, in closing, you may add that the '49ers have also continued to prosper on through the ensuing years.

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Bill Bender Sketches His Life and Career

I first saw the light of day in El Segundo, California, on December 31, 1918. It was the tail end of World War I and people, nurses and even doctors were sick and dying of the flu. Consequently my birth was never recorded until the following year on January 5, 1919. So right off the bat my life was a wee bit mixed up. Still I'd rather have two birth dates than two heads.

School to me was an unnecessary interruption but I hung in there and somehow managed to emerge with a diploma, to the amazement of everyone. To most, the diploma was a stepping stone to higher education but it was my walking papers to the good life. The ink wasn't even dry when I told my folks adios, saddled up with my pack horse trailing and headed for cow country.

Some years later, recuperating from an injury while breaking a bronc, the writing bug hit me. I turned out manuscripts right and left but nothing sold. I then tried illustrating them with pen and ink drawings but all that managed to do was slow down my output. Then a manuscript was returned, but this time with a two page letter attached. Editors with their hectic schedules usually send out printed rejection slips, but this editor was different. His name was Paul Bailey from the Westernlore Press in California and he gave me lots of encouragement and advice which basically boiled down to twenty words. He said, "You don't wrote very well and you don't draw very well but your best bet is to stick with the drawing". With those kind words it wasn't long before my typewriter and I arrived in California, met Paul Bailey, and the rest is history.

Soon afterward I crossed the trail of Jimmy Swinnerton, the desert painter. Jimmy was 75 at the time but had never learned to drive and since I was footloose and fancy free I began chauffeuring him to the desert and indian country in search of subjects to paint. With time on my hands I began sketching the landscape also, and once I got the feel of that little ol' paintbrush in my roping hand, I hung on and never put it down. Before long I decided to go for broke and make painting my life's work.

Sales were few and far between but I painted constantly, slept on the ground, cooked over a campfire and followed the sun. Winters were spent in Palm Desert under a cottonwood tree. Today the Living Desert, a non-profit wildlife and botanical park covers my old "winter home". As the weather warmed I drifted into Arizona, New Mexico and finally Colorado. At the first tinge of frost, I high-tailed it into Utah, Nevada, Death Valley and finally again set up housekeeping beneath my friendly cottonwood in Palm Desert.

In 1950, the Death Valley 49ers encampment gave us painters an outlet for our work. Soon after that, Randall Henderson presented my first one-man show at the Desert Magazine. From there on things began popping fast and furious. More one-man shows, books to illustrate and even a wife, In 1957, Helen and I pledged to go through the rest of our lives in double harness which called for a home, utility bills and mortgage like everyone else.

In 1962, Ed Ainsworth came out with the book, *Painters of the Desert*, and I made the last chapter. Today I'm the only one still living out of all the artists detailed in the book. The mid-60s saw the U.S. Air Force flying me to the orient as a civilian to do some painting for them. For a feller who'd never been higher off the ground than to nail a few cedar shakes on a cabin roof, well this was some experience as I flew in all kinds of weather and planes. A few years later, the U.S. Navy flew me to Pensacola to record The Cadet Training Program and from those hombres I learned what flying was all about. When my pilot pointed down to a wee speck in the ocean and told me to tighten my harness as we were coming in for a landing, my shirttail went up my back like a window shade. However I survived and many others until I'm now an honorary Tailhook Airdale.

As I try on my 80th year for size, some folks look upon me as retired which I definitely am not. True I no longer chase over the length and breadth of this country with one-man shows, but my private clientele keeps me busy as ever. Painting to me isn't work but rather a way of life and I'll keep dabbing away until a time when they lower me into the ground, put a lily in my painting hand and gently pat me in the face with a spade.

✦✦✦

DEATH VALLEY '49ERS
NON-PROFIT CORP.